

Revivals And Church History :: Preparing a Church for a "Revival Effort"

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What can we do to prepare for the upcoming week of 'revival' effort?"

Before attempting to answer this question, there are two things I need to state at the outset: 1) the question itself implies that even though we are cast solely upon our sovereign Lord for awakening, we are responsible to seek Him personally and corporately for quickening grace, and 2) it is especially necessary in these beguiled days to seek to assist God's people in coming to a proper distinction between genuine "revival" and what is commonly termed in our day a "revival effort." The former is a work of God while the latter is, by definition and common practice, best defined in terms of human activity and effort.

Therefore, I place before any pastor and church who is serious about getting ready for a "revival effort" the following guidelines.

Before all else, ready the church by preaching clearly and repeatedly the scriptural picture of genuine revival.

The contemporary concept of revival is anything but revival in reality. In biblical terms revival is not a scheduled series of services. It is not an evangelistic effort. It is not securing an outside evangelist and music man to lead out in the attempt to stir things up spiritually. It is not simply publicity and special events and good preaching and heart-warming singing and fervent appeals for the lost to be saved. It is not decisions nor additions to the church, nor even renewed enthusiasm. Some of this or all of this may be present and yet true revival be absent indeed.

Therefore, preparation involves setting forth the truth from both scripture and church history that revival is, before all else, a sovereign work of God among His people (thus the prophet prays, "*Revive Thy work*," Hab. 3:2). It is an invasion of fresh spiritual life (Lu. 15:24), a turning back of His own unto Himself (Lam. 5:21), an outpouring of His Spirit upon His wilting vineyard (Isa. 32:15). It is an extraordinary work of God producing extraordinary results among both believers and dead, careless sinners. One would do well to read and study *Lectures on Revivals* by W. B. Sprague (Banner of Truth Trust).

May the Lord be pleased to use His heralds far and wide to destroy false notions regarding "revival" and to establish in their place the biblically warranted and historically exemplified vision of revival as a sovereign, gracious work of God. This in and of itself would signal the first showers from on high.

Further, appeal urgently to the church to look only to the Lord for quickening and awakening grace.

True revival, like salvation, is of the Lord. Individually and corporately, it comes not except He "rend the heavens and come down" to us in restoring mercies (Isa. 64:1). Tell it more than once that "it is not by might nor by power but by My Spirit saith the Lord" (Zech. 4:6). I fear that in these days of man-centered revivalism and carnal promotions even many of God's own people slight the truth of John 6:63: "the flesh profits nothing, the Spirit quickens."

So then, when facing a series of "revival services" the local church is best prepared when hearts are shut up to the Father as their sole hope for awakening. God uses human instrumentality in restoring His work among His people, but in and through it all it is the Lord's doings and it is marvelous in our eyes. He alone is the source of vital revival. He alone is the One in whom we must hope. It is to Him alone that all glory must come. As Richard Owen Roberts writes: "The purpose of revival is to make God, not men, famous; to focus the eyes of the people, not upon human leaders, but upon the Divine Leader; to give glory not to great men, but to a great Savior" (*Revival*, p.104).

Let the weeks before a "revival meeting" be weeks of turning minds Godward. Preach . . . teach . . . think: "O God, restore us and cause Thy face to shine upon us, and we will be saved" (Ps. 80:7). Pray for any guest ministers that shall labor among you, and know in truth that "all is vain, unless the Spirit of the Holy One come down." Trust accordingly! Prepare accordingly!

Pastor and people must seek God in private and public prayer.

When it is made obvious to the heart that we can never experience true revival unless our God is pleased to bear His arm in arresting and convicting, awakening and saving power, then we will be quick to seek His face in prayer.

Come aside, dear brother, and retire daily to your prayer closet. Give attention to the "Lord God to seek Him by prayer and supplication with fasting, sackcloth and ashes" (Dan. 9:3). Let all else be set aside for a season. Think not even of the other brethren and their collective need for a fresh touch. Deal with yourself for now. Use the very plea of Daniel (9:4-19) for your own callings--the confession of personal sin, the appeal to His covenant mercies, the open avowal of shame and deep need, the cry for God to let His "face shine" again on His "desolate sanctuary," the burning zeal for the Father's glory. Let your appeal be grounded solely upon His mercy "O my God, incline Thine ear and hear! Open Thine eyes and see our desolations . . . for we are not presenting our supplications before Thee on account of any merits of our own, but on account of Thy great compassion . . . O Lord, hear! O Lord, forgive! O Lord, listen and take action! For Thine own sake, O my God, do not delay" (18-19). Come pastor, come people, pray for your own souls first. Wrestle alone with God for the needed blessing. "Pray without ceasing" (1 Thess. 5:17).

But again, prayer must be stressed for the whole assembly. Not simply in the weeks prior to the scheduled meetings must prayer prevail, but let prayer for a great awakening be the atmosphere and practice of each and every gathering of the church. "Prayer for revival must also become a major part of the prayer life of the local church. It ought to find its way into the public services of worship. It ought to dominate the prayer meetings of the congregation . . . A mighty concert of prayer is needed" (*Roberts, Revival, p.147*).

It would be good to make the very words of scripture the united intercessions of the church. Plea back passages like these:

Quote:

"Lord, revive Thy world in the midst of the years, in the midst of the years make it known; in wrath remember mercy" (Hab. 3:2).
"Revive us, and we will call upon Thy name. O Lord of hosts, restore us; cause Thy face to shine upon us, and we will be saved" (Ps. 80:18-19).
"Wilt Thou not Thyself revive us again, that Thy people may rejoice in Thee" (Ps. 85:6).
"For the sake of Thy name, O Lord, revive me" (Ps. 143:10).
"Restore us to Thee, O Lord, that we may be restored; renew our days as of old" (Lam. 5:21).
"Oh, that Thou wouldst rend the heavens and come down that the mountains might quake at Thy presence" (Isa. 64: 1).

To prepare for a "revival meeting," pray for genuine revival--alone and together. "Ask, and it shall be given to you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened to you" (Matt. 7:7).

Revival in a church can never be scheduled. If it could, we would have long ago and with seasonal regularity experienced such holy visitations. Rather, if and when revival comes, it shall be the gracious work of Him "Who works all things after the counsel of His will" (Eph. 1:11). However, we must never be sluggardly in our duties to strive for revival in the biblical sense--both in our own lives and in the church at large.

What then? It is not wrong to set up special times and meetings for concentrating on revival in our local assemblies. While we do so, however, we must recognize that this is never enough. We must do more, much more:

- i. - We must cast ourselves wholly upon God.
- ii. - We must heatedly and humbly seek the Lord and pleadingly call upon Him for all that He alone can do (Isa. 55:6).
- iii. - We must desire and ask for divine illumination respecting our spiritual standing (Ps. 139:23-24; Lam. 3:40).
- iv. - And we must decidedly, by the Holy Spirit's enabling, "forsake our wicked ways" and "return to the Lord" (Isa. 55:7).
Revival is always the Lord's work, but true repentance is always our duty (Rev. 2:5-6; 39, 19).

Finally: revival preparation is not a formula. *It is*, looking up, praying on, staying at it. *It is* working for that for which you are praying. *It is*, with brokenness taking your place at His feet. *It is*, God again taking His place of splendor among His people. With a zeal for His glory and a yearning for gospel advance let the church, yea, any church, prepare aright for such . . . starting *now*.